

want low taxes. They tell me that they want a secure retirement. And that is really what the agenda of the Republican Congress is. Our agenda is to help our schools and make sure that we put more dollars into the classroom, dollars that are determined how they are spent by local school boards and local teachers and local parents.

Our agenda is to lower the tax burden on the middle class and also to secure retirement by ensuring that our Social Security system is sound and rewarding savings for retirement.

But we also have another challenge that faces us, and it is really an opportunity, and that is the opportunity that comes from this Congress's probably greatest accomplishment, the first balanced budget in 28 years.

We are now expected to see a \$2.7 trillion surplus, a balanced budget bonus, an overpayment of tax revenue, extra money that is burning a hole in the pockets here in Washington. And that is really what the debate will be, what do we do with that surplus? Some want to spend it all. Others want to do other things.

The President says we should use 62 percent of the surplus for saving Social Security and the rest we should spend on new government programs. We on the Republican side say that we agree that 62 percent should go to Social Security.

Last year, we proposed 90 percent so we could do at least 62 percent. But we also want to give the rest back and pay down the national debt and lower the tax burden, particularly for middle-class working families.

Our philosophy is fairly simple. We believe that taxpayers back home in Illinois and back home in America can better spend their hard-earned dollars and their hard-earned salary better back home than we can for them in Washington. That is why we want to give back part of the surplus to pay off the national debt and to lower the tax burden at the same time we save Social Security.

Some say, gee, is there really a need to lower the tax burden on families? Let me share some statistics here. The tax burden on American families is the highest in history, in fact, the highest in peacetime history. In fact, 40 percent of the average Illinois family's income today goes to government at one level, local, State, and Federal taxes. Twenty-one percent of our gross domestic product goes to the Federal Government in taxes. And, since 1992, the amount of taxes collected from individuals has gone up 63 percent.

Clearly, that tax burden is too high, and we need to find ways to help the middle class by lowering the tax burden so they can keep more of what they earn.

I believe that as we look for ways to lower the tax burden on middle-class families that our focus should be on

simplifying the Tax Code and bringing fairness to the Tax Code and also eliminating discrimination in the Tax Code. And as we look for those priorities and how best to simplify the Tax Code and eliminate discrimination in the Tax Code, I believe that we should focus on the most discriminating sequence of our Tax Code today, and that is the discrimination in the Code that says that 21 million married working couples pay, on average, \$1,400 more in higher taxes just because they are married.

Under our Tax Code, if they get married they pay more than if they stay single; and that is just wrong. And I think it is not right and it is not fair that 21 million married working couples pay, on average, \$1,400 more in higher taxes just because they are married.

In the south suburbs of Chicago, \$1,400 is one year's tuition at Joliet Junior College. It is 3 months of day care at a local child-care center. It is 6 months worth of car payments. It is a washer and a dryer for a family. It is real money for real people.

I am proud to report to the House today that almost 230 Members, a bipartisan majority of this House, has joined as cosponsors of the Marriage Tax Elimination Act, which would eliminate discrimination in the Tax Code and eliminate the marriage penalty.

As we work to simplify the Tax Code, as we work to lower the tax burden, I hope we can make elimination of the marriage tax penalty our number-one priority.

EDUCATION FLEXIBILITY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. ROEMER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ROEMER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about an idea that the gentleman from Delaware (Mr. CASTLE) and I introduced as legislation last year called education flexibility.

The gentleman from Delaware (Mr. CASTLE), a Republican from Delaware, and I, a Democrat from Indiana, have worked on this proposal for 8 months; and we are very excited about the good bipartisan potential, the bold idea that this proposal brings to our schools across this great country.

Also, in addition to being a bipartisan idea, it is also an idea brought forward by the new Democratic coalition. Our new Democratic coalition is a coalition devoted to old values and new ideas.

The old values in this education flexibility bill, the old value is local control, that our schools in Indiana and Colorado, California and New York decide what is taught, decide what action is taken in our schools. So the old value is local control.

The new idea is enhanced flexibility, to try some new things, to boldly and

creatively reform our education system and continue to fix public education in this great United States of America.

So we have old values and new ideas. We have a Republican and a Democratic sponsor, and we have the new Democratic coalition working on this.

I support this education flexibility bill that the gentleman from Delaware (Mr. CASTLE) and I have introduced for three reasons. One, because it is a bold, new, creative idea that is working substantively in 12 States. We tried Ed Flex as a pilot program four and a half years ago. It is working in Ohio. It is working in Michigan. It is working in Illinois. It is working in Texas. This idea is working across the United States in 12 States.

How is it working? Let me give my colleagues a couple of examples. In Texas, which currently has this Ed Flex authority, Texas has outlined stringent accountability standards for its local schools. Ed Flex States have been innovative in the use of their waivers, and I think all States should be able to be innovative and have this opportunity.

Secondly, Maryland was able to use Ed Flex and reduce the teacher-student ratio in math and science classes from 25-1 to 12-1 and give more intensive teaching and schooling to those students in math and science programs.

Also, in the State of Kansas, we have seen the Ed Flex have and show the opportunity to better coordinate title I to many of our disadvantaged students and to be there to allow a seamless delivery of services to some of the most at risk, some of the most disadvantaged students in inner city areas, without diminishing the targeting of title I monies.

So one, it is working in 12 States, it is bold, and we should have all 50 States have this opportunity.

Secondly, the second reason I support it, it is not a mandate, it is not new paperwork, it is not handcuffs. It is a string of accountability to one thing, student performance.

And, thirdly, it is bipartisan.

Let us show the United States that we can reach across the aisle, Democrat and Republican alike, on an education issue, a bold new idea like education flexibility, and help reform and fix our great public school network in this United States of America.

I encourage my colleagues to cosponsor the Education Flexibility bill introduced by the gentleman from Delaware (Mr. CASTLE) and myself.

POPE SCOOPED PRESS ON IRAQ

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. BOB SCHAFER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SCHAFER. Mr. Speaker, the media entertained then summarily dismissed fantastic "Wag the Dog" analogies to December's missile strike